

## How to Do Expository Bible Teaching (Part 5 of 9: Helpful Tools and Resources)

Historic Faith Series on Expository Teaching

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### **XII. Advantages of Using (or at Least Checking) the Septuagint**

- a. The Septuagint (abbreviated LXX) is a famous Greek language translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
  - i. This translation was made by Jews selected by the High Priest in Jerusalem, to create a version of their Scriptures in Greek, for the library of Alexandria, Egypt (according to various ancient historical sources).
  - ii. The translations of the different books were made over a period of time, but generally considered around the period 250-200 BC.
  - iii. This version was highly respected, and was used by Jews all over the world (many of whom could not read Hebrew).
    - 1. Recall that after the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Greek language was spread widely across the ancient world (including into Europe, North Africa, Egypt, Middle East, Persia, and even into India).
    - 2. Greek became the second language to much of the world, and the language of commerce. Therefore, this translation put the Hebrew Scriptures into a form that could be widely read and understood by the Gentiles from the East and West, as well.
- b. Those who wrote the New Testament or were quoted in it (including Jesus, Peter, Paul, Stephen, and the writer of Hebrews) are generally following the LXX when they quote or refer to Old Testament passages.
  - i. About 90% of the time when the Masoretic Text (the Hebrew text dating back to about 900 AD that is the basis for the Old Testament in most modern Bible translations) and the LXX *diverge*, the New Testament writers are following the LXX.
  - ii. One example (of many in the New Testament): In **Hebrews 10**, the writer is quoting from **Habakkuk** and says,
    - 1. “but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” (**Hebrews 10:38**, ESV)
    - 2. **Question:** Where in the Old Testament does it say, “the righteous (or just) one shall live by faith.”?

- a. **Answer:** This is from **Habakkuk 2:4**.
3. **Tougher Question:** Where in your Bible, in the Old Testament, does it say, "...but if he shrinks back my soul will have no pleasure in him."? The author of **Hebrews** uses this phrase to establish a very significant point in his argument. However, where is that from? What Old Testament passage is the author of **Hebrews** quoting?
  - a. You will not find that phrase in the Masoretic Text. There, **Habakkuk 2:4** reads:
    - i. "Behold, *his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him*, but the righteous shall live by his faith." (**Habakkuk 2:4**, ESV)
    - ii. "Behold *the proud*, *His soul is not upright in him*; But the just shall live by his faith." (**Habakkuk 2:4**, NKJV)
  - b. However, the same passage in the LXX reads quite differently.
    - i. "*If any man should shrink back*, *My soul will not be pleased with him*, but the righteous will live by My faith." (**Habakkuk 2:4**, LES)
  - c. **Answer to the Tough Question:** The Hebrews writer *is* quoting from **Habakkuk 2:4**. However, he is quoting the LXX, rather than the Masoretic text.
- c. The early Christian writers (for over the first three hundred years of the church), when they quote from the Old Testament, are following the LXX as well. The LXX was considered the most reliable form of the Old Testament by the early church, and is still relied upon by the Greek Orthodox and other Orthodox churches.
- d. Example of "Joshua/Jesus"
  - i. Justin Martyr, reading the Old Testament from the LXX, speaks of: "Jesus, son of Nun".
  - ii. In **Numbers 13**, when the 12 Spies are sent out to spy out the land of Canaan, in most modern Bibles it says that Hoshea son of Nun was given the name "*Joshua*". (**Numbers 13:8, 13:16**)
  - iii. However, Justin Martyr was reading from LXX, where the word is: *Ἰησοῦς* (exactly the same name in Greek as the 'New Testament' *Jesus*).

- iv. Even if you don't have access to the LXX, you can see this for yourself (that both men are called by the same name in Greek, 'Jesus') in an interlinear Greek/English New Testament.
  - 1. In both **Acts 7:45** (Stephen's speech) and **Hebrews 4:8** we find discussion about *Joshua* (the 'Old Testament' Jesus). In the interlinear Greek, you can see the same name (in Greek) that is translated as '*Jesus*' throughout the New Testament.
- v. Once you see the connection between these two names, you can better appreciate the significance of the *specific name* that the angel told Mary to give to her firstborn son (**Luke 1:31**). For example:
  - 1. *Jesus* was the one who would finish the mission begun by Moses.
  - 2. *Jesus* was the name of the man Moses was told to lay his hands on, to leave a successor after his death, "so that the people would not be like *sheep without a shepherd*". (**Numbers 27:17**)
- e. If we want to know how Greek words found in the New Testament would have been understood by Christians in the beginning, the LXX can be a great resource. Many critically important New Testament words are also found throughout the LXX, which was written only about 200 years before the birth of Jesus. From that, we can see how these Greek words would have been understood by the apostles and their first-century disciples.
  - i. More examples of New Testament Greek words that you will find in the LXX include: love, grace, faith, holiness and baptism.
  - ii. Greek words like *agape/ἀγάπη* (love) and *charis/χάρις* (grace, favor) were everyday, commonly used words in the first century that are often misunderstood today. We can plainly understand their meanings to the people of that time, by looking at how those words are used throughout the LXX.
    - 1. For example, from context we can see that '*agape*' is not some special Greek word that is used only to refer to a *higher, selfless form* of love. It simply has a meaning very much like our English word '*love*', with a similarly wide range of applications.
      - a. For example, in the LXX we see this Greek word used to describe the 'love' that Samson had for Delilah (an immoral relationship with a deceitful woman) in **Judges 16:4** and **16:15**.
      - b. We can see this in the New Testament as well, where it says that Balaam "*loved* the wages of wickedness" (**2 Peter 2:15**). Again, the verb form of '*agape*' is used.

- c. The idea that the word *agape* refers to some *special, higher form* of love is a widespread misconception in Christian circles, Catholic as well as Protestant. C. S. Lewis popularized this concept in his book, *The Four Loves*, and Bishop Fulton Sheen promoted the concept in Roman Catholic circles.
- 2. Likewise, the word ‘charis’, does not mean “*unmerited favor*”. It simply means favor, *regardless* of whether or not that favor was based on something good that we did.
  - a. Many Protestants define grace as, “*unmerited favor*”, based on the assumption that we can discern the meaning of the word from a statement made by Paul (often taken out of context) **Ephesians 2:8-9**.
  - b. However, Peter and James both use this word in quoting from **Proverbs 3** in the LXX where it says:
    - i. “The Lord resists the proud; but he *gives grace to the humble*.” (**Proverbs 3:34**, Brenton LXX En)
    - ii. Peter (**1 Peter 5:5**) and James (**James 4:6**) call the Christians to be humble. Both use **Proverbs 3** to remind them that what we do (choosing whether to be humble vs. proud) will have an impact on whether or not we receive God’s grace (*His favor*).
- iii. If you see how they were used in the LXX, you can better appreciate what these words meant to the apostles and their first-century readers.
- iv. A building is only as strong as the bricks from which it is made. If the bricks are faulty, the building will crumble. The words used in the Bible are like the bricks of a building. If our understanding of the meaning of key words is faulty (words like: grace, faith, works, love, etc.), then regardless of how skilled the ‘mason’ is, the building will fail and crumble.
- v. For exploring the meaning of New Testament words as they appear in context in the LXX, I have found that a great resource is the *Apostolic Polyglot Bible*.
  - 1. It has LXX and Greek New Testament together under one cover, both in Greek/English interlinear format, with common Greek (modified Strong’s) numbering for each word tied to a common Greek/English lexical concordance in the back of the book.

2. While the ability to read ancient (Biblical) Greek is a benefit, it certainly is not necessary to becoming a great Bible teacher. Relatively late in life (in my mid-sixties), after I had been teaching the Bible for decades, I had a great opportunity to learn ancient Greek, and went for it. In my case, two of the reasons I was motivated to do so were:
  - a. So many times in hearing messages from preachers who didn't know Greek, I would hear them say something like, "I know you can't tell this from reading your English-language Bible translations, but in the Greek it really means such-and-such." When I took the time to check out these claims, it seemed that about half of the time, they were wrong! They did not know what they were talking about. I wanted to learn Greek in self-defense, so that I could readily see through false claims like these.
  - b. Another thing that motivated me to read Greek was my interest in the prophecies of the Old Testament. So many times when these prophecies are quoted by Jesus, the apostles or their disciples in the New Testament, they were following the LXX. So I wanted to be able to read Greek in order to read the LXX, to understand the same text they were reading from, directly.

### **XIII. Benefit of Considering the Understanding of Early Christians**

- a. If we are seeking the historic faith, the reason should be obvious to us.
  - i. Example: Imaginary seminar on the **Book of Revelation**
    1. Imagine you are able to attend a Bible seminar that has break-out classes offered by the most famous Bible teachers of all time, including men like: N.T. Wright, Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Barclay, Thomas Aquinas, etc.
      - a. During the break-out session they are teaching in various rooms, concurrently.
      - b. You would need to pick which break-out session to attend (since you could only attend one).
    2. However, one of the sessions is being taught by *an unknown speaker* from the early second century who *personally* learned the Bible *at the feet of the apostle John* and *grew up speaking Koine Greek* as his native language.

3. **Question:** *Who* would you want to listen to? Who would be in the best position to provide the *original intention of the author* who wrote the **Book of Revelation**?
  - a. For me, it would be an easy choice. If I wanted to understand the author's intent, I would want to learn from someone *closest to the author*.
4. When we read the early Christian writers, we have an opportunity to learn from men who were just one or two human links removed from the apostles themselves. Also, many of them were fluent in Koine Greek (the language of the New Testament), so are in a much better position to accurately explain the meaning of words, phrases and figures of speech found in the New Testament text.
  - a. Another advantage of the earliest Christian writers is that they have not been polluted by so many of the heresies that have sprung up and taken hold within the church over the centuries.
- ii. *Criticisms I have heard frequently* regarding the early Christian writers include:
  1. They were not inspired writers; their insights and opinions are fallible.
  2. Errors crept into the church early on.
  3. (Unspoken objection of many church leaders *who don't like the early Christian writings*: They don't line up with everything that our church teaches [or neglects to teach]; and we have no ability to control what they say!)
- iii. Never forget: the Bible (not the early Christian writings) must always be the standard.
  1. Start with the Bible, and end there as well! If early Christians disagree with what the Scripture plainly says, then of course we go with the Scriptures.
  2. If a belief that does not contradict the Scriptures was held in all parts of the first and second century in world (in the Roman Empire, Parthian Empire, Middle East, India, North Africa, etc.), in an era where there was no mass communication and no internet, there are two possibilities:

- a. Either that belief was handed down originally before the apostles and their disciples spread it throughout the world, OR
  - b. Christians all over the world coincidentally at the same time all independently adopted the same heresy.
  - c. **Question:** Which of the two above possible explanations do *YOU* think is more likely?
3. **Question:** If a passage of Scripture could be interpreted in more than one way (for example, figuratively vs. literally), but the first and second century Christian writers *universally* understood it one way, which understanding is *most likely* the correct one?
  - a. For example, Jesus said in **John 3:3-5**, “You must be *born again...* of water and the spirit”.
  - b. Christians today have different theories about what this expression “born again” means. Does it refer to a certain spiritual experience involving a prayer and accepting Jesus? Or does this refer to Christian baptism?
  - c. Early Christian writers, from all parts of the world, understood that this statement by Jesus referred to the spiritual rebirth that takes place when a believer is baptized in water, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
    - i. Note also that this widespread understanding does not contradict any of the other Scriptures.
4. Any doctrine that did not show up until the 600’s or 1500’s, that was unknown to the apostles and early church, should be immediately *highly suspect!*
5. Reading the early Christians can provide a good ‘check’ to make sure we are not drifting away from “the faith once for all entrusted to the saints” into heresies that developed later.

#### ***XIV. Useful Tools for Preparing Bible Lessons***

- a. More than one good English language translation of the Bible. For the Old Testament, include versions based on both the Masoretic Text (Hebrew) and the Septuagint (Greek).
- b. For those unfamiliar with the early Christian writings, good resources to start with might include:

- i. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, by Everett Ferguson
- ii. Some accessible works by early Christian writers with modern English translations, available through Scroll Publishing:
  - 1. *We Don't Just Speak Great Things, We Live Them* (Mark Felix / Justin Martyr)
  - 2. *Intimacy with God* (Clement of Alexandria)
- c. *Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF)*, a 9 or 10 volume set (available online)
  - i. Volume 10, which includes a topical index and a verse-by-verse concordance for the entire set, is especially helpful for finding what you want in the other nine volumes.
- d. *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, edited by David Bercot. This is a topical guide to the ANF set that includes many quotes from early Christians along with references.
- e. *Historic Faith Commentary Series* (only first half of **Matthew** has been published as of 3/2021), which provides footnotes back to all the primary source material.
  - i. NOTE: It is important to take the time to go back to the primary sources. Also, be sure to reference those when you teach others, so that they can independently verify from primary sources, as well.